

## **Representative Sewell's follow-up question:**

### **General reliance on Social Security (Nancy Altman)**

As we have discussed today, millions of seniors rely on Social Security benefits as their only source of income.

Can you expand upon how the livelihoods of retirees are impacted by this reliance and the types of sacrifices they are forced to make to afford basic necessities like groceries, housing, and health care?

### **Altman Response:**

Without Social Security, about [two out of five seniors](#) would have incomes below the federal poverty line. Thanks to Social Security, the poverty rate among those aged 65 and older [has been brought down to](#) just [over 9 percent](#) (just over 14 percent, when the Supplemental Poverty Measure is the benchmark).

Although the poverty rate has been reduced, millions of seniors have incomes that are barely above the poverty line, because Social Security's benefits are so modest. Over 30 percent of Americans aged 65 or older have incomes that are [less than 200 percent](#) of the official poverty level (42 percent of older adults have incomes less than 200 percent of the Supplemental Poverty Measure).

Social Security is especially important to women and people of color. Without Social Security, the poverty rate of women aged 65 or older would be 42.9 percent. With Social Security, it is 10.5 percent. Without Social Security, the poverty rate of Latinos aged 65 or older would be 46.1 percent. With Social Security, it is 17 percent. Without Social Security, the poverty rate of African-Americans aged 65 or older would be 51.7 percent. With Social Security, it is 19 percent.

Because so many seniors are living in or near poverty, they count on their monthly Social Security benefits for the bare necessities. Indeed, at Social Security Works, we hear constantly from Social Security beneficiaries who have insufficient incomes to cover even the bare necessities. They must choose between life-saving medicine and food. After a lifetime of work, this is unacceptable. That is one of the many reasons Social Security Works advocates expanding, not cutting, Social Security.